

CURRENT TOPICS

IN THE house of commons, March 21, the liberal leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, moved his vote of censure presented March 16, to the effect that "this house disapproves the conduct of his majesty's government in advising the crown not to disallow the ordinance for the introduction of Chinese labor in the Transvaal." The Associated press says: "Sir Henry said nothing the government had done since the close of the South African war had so sorely tried the people of this country as its sanction of the introduction of Chinese labor into South Africa. If the new departure was not checked, it would be a source of future weakness, not only to the Transvaal, but to the people of South Africa. It was impossible to conceive a greater departure from the principles by which Great Britain had hitherto made her way in the world than the importation of aliens as the bondmen of mining speculators. The Europeans in South Africa, Sir Henry declared, were by a large majority opposed to yellow labor, and the object of his motion was to stop the government's policy in its earliest stage." After a protracted debate the censure motion was rejected by a vote of 299 to 242.

AN IMPORTANT decision was rendered by the United States supreme court April 4, in the case involving the right of the interstate commerce commission to require the anthracite coal carrying railroads to produce their books and papers. The court held that the commission had the authority to make the investigation and examine the documents bearing upon the subject. The opinion was delivered by Justice Day and concurred in by seven other justices. Justice Brewer dissented, but did not give his reasons for the dissent.

THE opinion was the result of a case instituted before the interstate commerce commission by William R. Hearst, the New York editor. On November 5, 1902, Mr. Hearst filed with the interstate commerce commission a complaint against the coal trust. On March 12, 1903, the commission ordered a public hearing. From April 21 to April 30, hearings were held in New York city, President Baer and other trust officials being summoned to the stand. During this hearing several of the coal trust officers refused to answer certain questions and declined also to produce papers. The commission then called upon Attorney General Knox asking for a court order requiring that the questions be answered and the documents be produced. On June 2, 1903, Federal Judge Lacombe ordered the officers of the coal to show cause why they should not comply with the commission's order. On June 10, Judge Lacombe decided that the questions need not be answered and the papers need not be produced. It was therefore a victory for the coal trust.

THE case was appealed to the supreme court and on March 9, 1904, arguments were submitted. On April 4, 1904, the supreme court rendered its decision reversing that of Judge Lacombe and confirming the right of the interstate commerce commission to do the things which Judge Lacombe said they had no authority to do. It was contended by the attorneys of the coal trust that a private citizen had no authority to bring these proceedings before the interstate commerce commission. The court holds, however, that a private citizen does have that right and therefore upholds Mr. Hearst's participation in these proceedings.

CLARENCE J. SHERAN, attorney for Mr. Hearst, explains in a public statement what the supreme court's decision means to the coal trust. Mr. Sheran explains: "It means that the coal trust must produce the entire series of the 14 Temple Iron company contracts. These contracts convict the railroads of pooling and violating the Sherman anti-trust law. It means that the coal trust must produce the 'coal purchase contracts.' These contracts convict the railroads of practicing gross discrimination in freight rates against independents. It means that Baer, Thomas and Truesdale must tell how the selling price of coal is fixed. It means that the favorite weapon of trusts in resisting prosecution—interminable delay—is no longer available, for, thanks to Mr.

Hearst's fight, the 'expediting of appeals acts' now apply to every such case. It means that any private citizen who is willing to do so may prosecute violators of the interstate commerce act."

MEMBERS of congress have for several weeks past devoted considerable energy in the effort to locate the responsibility for the publication of the Bristow report. It will be remembered that on the day following the publication of this report, the house devoted special attention to Mr. Bristow and he was bitterly criticised by many members and in several instances epithets were applied to the fourth assistant postmaster general. Later Mr. Bristow appeared before the committee and said that he was not at all responsible for the insertion of the congressmen's names in that report. Then Mr. Overstreet of Indiana, chairman of the house committee on postoffices, intimated that the report came from Postmaster General Payne. Finally, Mr. Payne, who has been confined to his room with sickness, denied responsibility and there seems now to be a disposition to attach the blame to Mr. Overstreet himself.

AN INTERESTING conference held recently at the Arlington Hotel in Washington city is described by a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune. It seems that a special committee of the house which is engaged in investigating the origin of the Bristow report, called upon Postmaster General Payne in his sick room and listened to Mr. Payne's statement. Mr. Payne prepared the statement in writing, which he submitted to the committee. He said that he did not consider the date as originally prepared, proper for publication, that he therefore sent in the correspondence without the names of the congressmen, because he believed in all cases the members of congress had done nothing more than their duty to their constituents. Mr. Payne declared positively that the demand for the names was made by Mr. Overstreet and that they were sent in response to a specific telephone request in the name of the postoffice committee.

THE scene about the sick bed of the postmaster general is described by the correspondent as being very dramatic. This correspondent says: "The postmaster general submitted two letters from Mr. Overstreet in which the latter requested information as to allowances and reduction in allowances for clerk hire in postoffices of the third and fourth classes. The information was sent and Mr. Payne said he later received word from the committee that the list as sent was not satisfactory. Mr. Payne's statement continues: 'As I did not esteem it to be just nor right to submit a list of these offices as shown in that schedule with nothing but the names of members of congress and others appended, without further explanation, I had an interview with Mr. Overstreet, at which it was agreed that the circumstances surrounding each case should be briefly set forth. On Sunday, January 31, the chairman called at my residence. About 40 per cent of the matter desired had been prepared and we went over it carefully. The chairman expressed himself as entirely satisfied with its form and substance. This list I personally returned to the department the next morning and I did not, nor did any one else to my knowledge, submit these lists nor any other matter called for and now being inquired into to any person outside the department, except to Mr. Overstreet on the occasion mentioned. The complete list was transmitted under date of February 5. Under date of February 16 and March 2 certain additional information regarding leases of premises for postoffices and allowances for rent, fuel, and light was transmitted to the committee. The testimony in the case will disclose the fact that the department was being urged to furnish this information at the earliest possible moment, and an extra force of men was employed who worked nights and Sundays in its preparation. The information was compiled by the most expert and efficient men in the department cognizant with the various subjects referred to.'"

AN INTERESTING chapter in the Dreyfus case is contributed by Labori, famous as the attorney for Dreyfus in the great trial. For

some time it has been reported that a coldness existed between Dreyfus and his former attorney. The Paris correspondent for the Chicago Tribune says: "As a matter of fact, Dreyfus has proved himself a monster of ingratitude towards those who were most instrumental in bringing him back from his prison in the Devil's island. Even Labori's fee has never been paid and Labori has been shocked, as poor Zola was shocked, at the lack of courage and dignity Dreyfus has manifested, his willingness to effect compromises at any cost, and his absolute disregard for everything save rehabilitation at any price."

IT IS further pointed out by this same authority that Labori was Zola's attorney and that after Labori's defense of the great writer, the Dreyfus family demanded his services. It is stated that Labori accepted the task even though he knew it would cost him his practice. The Tribune correspondent says: "During the trial at Rennes he was the terror of the military judges, owing to his pertinent questions—so much so that the Dreyfus family was approached by government representatives and asked to prevent Labori from pleading, promising other advantages. When Mathien Dreyfus first broached the subject to Labori his anger knew no bounds. 'What!' he exclaimed, 'you will traffic with the enemy when the cause is just!' But the family stood firm, and Labori finally renounced pleading, which at the time caused a great sensation. Dreyfus was condemned, but again the government officials approached the family and declared that the 'affair would be arranged.' The arrangement was soon known. The minister of war offered to pardon Dreyfus if he would ask for grace."

ACCORDING to the French custom, when a prisoner asks for pardon he must sign a statement to the effect that he has been justly sentenced and that he demands a pardon. The Tribune correspondent says that Labori protested against Dreyfus signing such a document. "Go to prison for ten years," he said, "but never dishonor yourself by acknowledging that you have been justly sentenced—thus you admit your guilt." But Dreyfus wanted to be free at any price, and, despite Labori, and despite P—, and Zola, who all declared it was dishonor to traffic if he was an innocent man, Dreyfus asked for grace, signing the fatal admission. Again the government promised that it would make it up to him, and it has kept its promise in commanding the revision, but for Labori, P—, and Zola all the sublime elements in the case were overshadowed the day Dreyfus declared over his signature that he had been justly condemned but demanded pardon. Out of this grew the troubles between Labori and his client, which found their epilogue in Labori's refusal to allow himself to be associated in any praise of Dreyfus. "I have in no way changed my opinion of the cause," Labori said to me, "but I was unwilling to be used as a witness to certain assertions I could not confirm." There is no doubt Dreyfus will be rehabilitated, and thus will close one of the most celebrated "causes de justice" in history.

THE Cuban republic is going through the embarrassments unavoidable in the self-government experiment. In fact, the reports of a session of the Cuban house of representatives on April 24 read like the reports of some of our state legislatures. Describing this scene, a Chicago Chronicle correspondent says: "The scene in the house of representatives was one of wild disorder. As a matter of fact, there was no formal opening of the house, owing to the inability to muster a quorum for the reason that every nationalist member refused to enter the chamber, the nationalists fearing that if the question of contested seats arose they would be outvoted by the coalition lately arranged between the republicans and moderate liberals. The nationalists, however, came into the building, accompanied by several hundred local followers, who crowded into the audience part of the chamber and into the halls and streets adjoining, shouting 'vivas' for the nationalist party. The republicans and moderate liberals, for the most part, remained in their seats. During the confusion the vice speaker of the house, the speaker, a nationalist, not being pres-